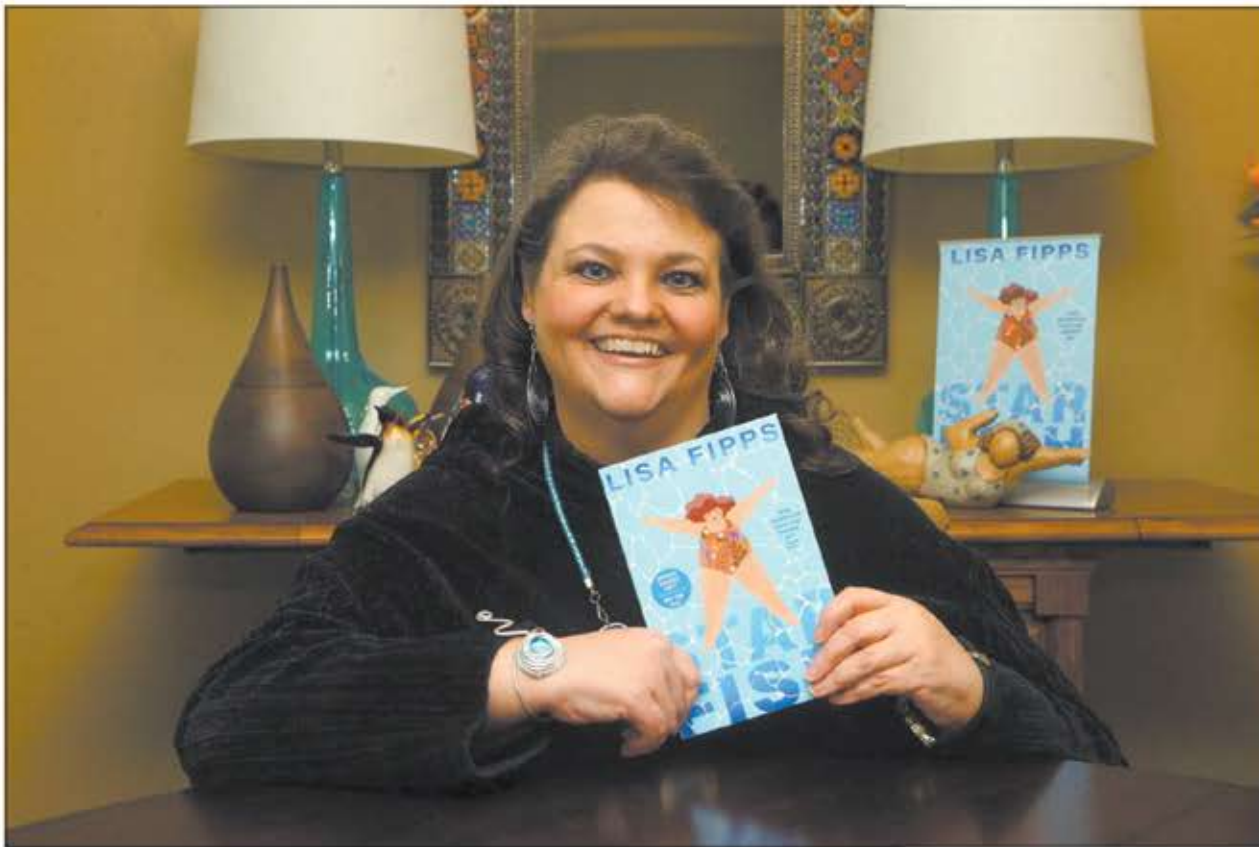


'Starfishing' with Ellie

Kokomo native's middle-grade novel tackles fatphobia



Kelly Lafferty Gerber | Kokomo Tribune

Lisa Fipps, the Kokomo-Howard County Public Library's marketing director, with her debut novel, "Starfish," on Tuesday, January 19, 2021.

LAURA ARWOOD
KOKOMO TRIBUNE

Growing up in a world obsessed with perfection and thinness is hard enough, but it's especially challenging for a middle schooler growing up fat, as told in a local author's debut book.

In "Starfish," Kokomo native Lisa Fipps' novel-in-verse, 11-year-old Ellie grapples with starting sixth grade while being fat-shamed at every turn, and eventually learns how to defend herself. The novel comes out March 9.

In the book, Ellie's best friend just moved from Texas to Indiana, and her school is full of bullies. Her mom, Miriam, is her biggest bully — by monitoring her food intake, pinning weight loss articles to the fridge and bringing up bariatric surgery.

Ellie navigates life by following "Fat Girl Rules," chief of which is "Make yourself small."

Thankfully, the Texas tween has a small support system

Find 'Starfish'

Website: <https://authorlisafipps.com/>

Find Lisa on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook at authorlisafipps

Copies will be available at KHCPL or any bookstore.

FIPPS' MEDIA TOUR:

A Texas Library Association panelist for "Tackling Tough

through compassionate educators, a few friends, a beloved pug and her psychiatrist father, who finds Ellie a therapist to help her work through her difficulties.

"Ellie is bullied relentlessly in the world," Fipps said. "If you are fat, the world expects you to be small. They don't want to see you, they don't want to hear you. You don't have a right to take up space."

Topics in Middle Grade," and a panelist for the "Annual Poetry Roundup," a North Texas Teen Book Festival speaker and a panelist for the Booklist/Penguin Young Readers' Feminist Reads of Spring & Summer 2021.

Listen to Fipps on the "Fat Like Me" podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/fat-like-me/film-episode-60-lisa-fipps>

Cover art by Tara O'Brien, www.taraobrien.co.

Through therapy and her support system, Ellie learns that she has a right to be seen, heard and take up space.

"In the forward, I put, 'When the world tries to make you small — starfish,'" Fipps said.

Fipps said that Ellie finds solace in the stance of a starfish; through swimming in her pool and taking up as much space as she needs.

"It makes her feel weightless in a weight-obsessed world," she said. "She starfishes. She learns how to be comfortable in her own skin and how to take up space."

As Ellie learns to stand up for herself, she finds her taking the "starfish stance" in life, by standing feet shoulder-width apart and spreading out her arms. The pre-teen learns to stand up to bullies without becoming a bully herself.

"A lot of times, when you go to stand up for yourself after being a bully, you end up being a bully in a way, or being mean in a way," Fipps said. "And that just makes you feel worse and it doesn't help the situation ... and as she does that, she starfishes."

The author started her career in journalism and now works as the Kokomo Howard-County Public Library (KHCPL) director of marketing. Her entire professional world has been surrounded by writing.

Agent Liza Royce found Fipps

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through a Twitter pitch. After shopping around the manuscript, Fipps' novel was published by Penguin Random House under the imprint, Nancy Paulsen Books. Fipps described Paulsen as "a legend."

She initially signed the contract in October 2018 as a

"middle grade" novel, for ages 9-13, and now that the time has come, Fipps said she can hardly contain her excitement.

"It's a dream come true," she said. "My lifetime dream has always been to be a full-time author. I'm not there yet but that's my goal. It's a milestone moment for me to have my first book out."

One thing that sets "Starfish" apart from other books

is that it is written in free verse, a form of poetry.

"At first, (Royce) and I were getting emails every day from editors, and they were saying 'We love it, we love it,' but there were no offers," Fipps said. "One editor wanted me to re-write the book as prose. And I couldn't do that."

Fipps said that when she writes, she's depicting scenes in her head, like a movie. She was struggling to find a way

to write them without it being "too bulky."

"Once I realized that other authors had written like this, that I could write a book in free verse, I knew that's what I needed to do," she said.

The book has already received some acclamations. "Starfish" has been named as a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection. The guild is tasked with putting the best books for young

readers in libraries across the country.

Fipps was inspired to write "Starfish" as a book she needed as a child.

"According to the CDC, 71% of Americans are fat," she said. "And yet, they are not represented, in media, fashion, or anywhere."

The use of the word "fat" was deliberate, as a move to take back the power of the word. Fipps said she wants

the word be used as a descriptor, like "short" or "tall," rather than an insult.

To criticisms that "Starfish" may glorify fatness or an unhealthy lifestyle, Fipps said that misses the point of starfishing.

"I'm glorifying that I don't care what size you are, you deserve to be treated like a human because you have intrinsic value and worth," she said. "Period."